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WHEN SWEDEN VOTED WET

By E. J. CAHILL.

AN American tourist in Stockholm in the early part of last August stepped out of his room to go in search of the hotel bar (bars are very rare things in Sweden). The first thing that struck his eye as he walked down the corridor was a sign in bold letters across a door. It read:

"Bad Rum."

As an almost completely Volsteadized American, our friend had his own opinions on bad rum, and so he walked on without comment. A few steps further on another sign challenged him with the black lettered expletive:

"Dam Rum."

"Hm," muttered our friend, "I wouldn't go quite as far as all that."

A few steps further on he was brought up sharply before a door from which stared the sinister slogan:

"Dam Bad Rum."

"Great Eighteenth Amendment," groaned the poor man as he made his melancholy way back to his room. "What an awful thing liquor must be in this country."

But, as he discovered later, the meaning of the legends, respectively, is "bath room," "ladies' room" and "ladies' bath room."

Still a great many people in Sweden declare that liquor is an awful thing. Before the referendum on prohibition on August 27 the belief was general that a majority were of that opinion.

On the 26th of August everybody in Sweden who was "in the know" was sure that poor old John was in for another funeral. Most people were convinced prohibition would win by a sixty to forty majority. And though the referendum was only consultative, to be taken up by Parliament later, a strong prohibition majority would practically have forced that body to sign the death warrant of alcohol.

"I believe in the enduring folly of human nature," said a Stockholm editor to me on the 26th, "and so I am sure that prohibition will win, because it would be a great folly for Sweden."

"Why a great folly?"

"Economically, first of all, our State now derives a revenue of 110,000,000 crowns from the liquor traffic. It would lose that, and in addition would have to spend almost as much more in an effort to stamp out bootlegging and smuggling. The Swedish liquor control, and the fact that such countries as Estonia and Finland have a much lower value than we have, has already brought us some liquor smuggling. Think of what would happen if we had full prohibition. Estonia alone could swamp us with liquor. Before the war Estonia made a large proportion of the hard liquor consumed in Russia. In our day she has found a profitable market in prohibition Finland and Norway. It is hard to get at definite figures, but it is said here that the one greatest revenue of the Estonian Government is derived from taxes on liquor taken out of the country by smugglers. They say Estonia is paying her national debt from that revenue. Prohibition will be a great folly for Sweden. And so we will get it. The world runs that way these days."

Sunday, August 27, was fair and fine, one of those wonderful Swedish summer days, clear and sunny and warm, without heat, of which Stockholm has had all too few this season. Great queues of people stretched

out along the streets at all the voting places. Sandwich men and women, too, paraded up and down, carry cartoons and printed signs exhorting the people not to forget to vote "yes," and also not to forget to vote "no." Richly costumed heralds on horseback rode around blaring out trumpet calls to the Armageddon of alcohol. Even the church bells of Stockholm—and Stockholm has many churches—seemed to cry out a musical clangor of "vote yes, vote

added significance, for Russia is a prohibition country, or nearly so.

Two women stood at the end of a long queue just off Gustaf Adolf's Square.

"This waiting is awful," said one, "but I must get in my 'yes' vote in favor of prohibition."

"It is awful," replied the other, "but I must get in my 'no' vote."

There was silence for nearly an hour. Then the "yes" lady ventured:

at the end of their queue. The way the women voted was a surprise to the prohibitionists. Fifty-three per cent. of the Stockholm vote on prohibition was cast by women. Of this 53 per cent. 44 was against and 9 in favor of prohibition. In Gothenburg, the second city in Sweden, 23,355 women voted against prohibition and 11,904 in favor. In the third city, Malmö, 15,141 women voted against and 4,511 in favor. The women were counted on by the prohibitionists just as men count on death and taxes.

Sunday night great crowds gathered in the public squares where the bulletins were shown. There was a feeling in the air that John Barleycorn was dying. The restaurants were alive with people. Liquor flowed as freely as might be under the restrictive control of Dr. Ivan Bratt's liquor system. And everywhere there was dancing. Appropriately enough the dances were American. The Swedes were dancing at what they thought to be John Barleycorn's wake, to the tune of American prohibition jazz.

And then the reports began to come in. Persistently they showed heavy majorities in the "no" column. A mighty "Skol to no" roared out in Stockholm's cafes. Out on Gustaf Adolf's Square a huge throng took up the old Swedish drinking song of "Helan Gar" and sang it with great effect. A very unusual thing for Sweden, that, for the Swedes are not "good mixers" in public gatherings, though they are great ensemble singers.

The result was in doubt for twenty-four hours. The anti-prohibition vote held strong, but as the returns from the country came in the prohibition vote climbed higher and higher. As late as Monday night, the 28th, the bulletins of two newspapers were at loggerheads over the result. The bulletin of the *Svenska Dagbladet* on Birger Jarls street showed a majority of 8,000 for prohibition. Just across the street the *Dagens Nyheter* announced a majority of 40,000 for the anti. People wandered back and forth between the two arguing and shaking their heads. It was a great plebiscite, the first in Swedish history. It brought out 61 per cent. of the country's total vote.

The complete official result of the vote was 920,655 against prohibition and 901,052 for, a majority of 29,602 out of 1,831,708 votes cast.

The results seem to show that Sweden has definitely decided on a restriction of alcohol as against complete prohibition. This restriction has been in effect for some years. Its present form is the system of Dr. Ivan Bratt, who is called the "liquor dictator of Sweden." Before the Bratt system was put into effect there had existed the so-called "Gothenburg system," which abolished the Swedish saloon and established certain hours when liquor could be sold.

Briefly, the Bratt system is this: All wine and spirits in Sweden containing over 3.6 per cent. alcohol are sold through the Wine and Spirits Central, the only organization in Sweden having the right to manufacture and to sell liquor wholesale. This organization sells to 120 local companies in as many local districts throughout Sweden, and these in turn supply individuals as well as hotels and restaurants. Individual buying is controlled by the "motbok." The "motbok" is a booklet with detachable slips on which its owner must

Continued on Page Twenty-three.



Electioneering at Stockholm polling place.

no." "vote no, vote yes." For even in Sweden's churches opinion is divided on prohibition. Newspapers interviewed men who had returned from the ends of the earth to vote in diverse ways. One enterprising journal, in accord with the spiritualistic trend of our time, printed interviews on prohibition with Sweden's historic dead. In the "King's Garden" the statue of Sweden's fighting king, Charles XII, still stretched a warning finger in the direction of Russia. And on this day with

"You're voting no, and I'm voting yes. Our votes will wipe each other out."

"Yes," said the other.

Another silence. Then the "yes" lady ventured again:

"It would come to the same if we both dropped out of the line. Shall we?"

"No, indeed," replied the other. "I'm going to get in my 'no' vote if it takes all night. And besides, one never can trust you prohibitionists."

And the two women held grimly on

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page		Page
When Sweden Voted Wet. By E. J. Cahill.....	1	New Fiction in Varied Forms:	
The Book Factory. By Edward Anthony.....	2	The Just Steward—Fair Harbor—Gargoyles—Love and Freindship—Still Life—Rolling Acres—The Cortlandts of Washington Square—Mummers in Mufti—Average Cabins—Broken Barriers—Sands—Tribby May Crashes In—The Voice in the Wilderness—Breath of Life—The Return of Blue Pete—Don Rodrigues—Richard—The Day After Dark—Doubting Castle—1943—The Second Flowering—In Jeopardy—The Fighting Edge—Captains of Souls—The Cat's Paw.....	13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20
The Default of Octavia Caesar. By Maurice Morris.....	3	The World of Foreign Books—Italian Books. Surveyed by Arthur Livingston.....	18
Another Northern Exposure. Traprock Trapped at Last. By Herman Swank.....	4	Books Received.....	21
What I Learned About South Seas Women. By James Norman Hall.....	5		
Chronicle and Comment. By Arthur Bartlett Maurice.....	6		
The World of Letters as Others See It.....	7		
What You Should Know About American Authors. XIII. Joseph C. Lincoln.....	8		
Social and Political Rank. By W. Townsend.....	9		
Spanish Mahogany. By Blanche McManus.....	10		
Eccentrics and Fakera. By Stanley Walker.....	12		